



GOD'S SCEPTRE

IN

THE NATION'S CALAMITY:

A SERMON

ON THE


DEATH OF PRESIDENT HARRISON.

By JOHN F. McLAREN,
OF GENEVA.

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DEUTERONOMY—CHAPTER XXXIV.

1 And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho. And the Lord showed him the land of Gilead, unto Dan,

2 And all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, unto the utmost sea,

3 And the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto Zoar.

4 And the Lord said unto him, This is the land which I sware unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither.

5 So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord.

6 And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.

7 And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.

8 And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days: so the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended.

9 And Joshua, the son of Nun, was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him: and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the Lord commanded Moses.

10 And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face,

11 In all the signs and the wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land.

12 And in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses showed in the sight of all Israel.

DISCOURSE.

WE have met together, my friends, on an occasion of sad and general interest: the special subject of our meditations is the death of our country's Chief Magistrate. We have already, in unison with our fellow-citizens, expressed our deep sense of the afflictive dispensation. And my present purpose is, not so much to invite a renewed commingling of your griefs, as to solicit your intelligent and devout consideration of the bereavement that causes them, as a sovereign dispensation of the King of kings. The intelligence of the President's death came upon us, like a thunder-clap out of a cloudless sky: we were startled, we were struck dumb,—we could only wonder and tremble. And I have intentionally deferred presenting the subject before you, for deliberate consideration, until the first paroxysm of your amazement had subsided, and the irrepressible gush of your generous grief had flowed forth,—your spontaneous and unanimous tribute to the illustrious dead.

In reflecting upon this sorrowful dispensation of divine providence, I have been deeply impressed with such passages of divine truth, as the following:

“CEASE YE FROM MAN, WHOSE BREATH IS IN HIS NOSTRILS: FOR WHEREIN IS HE TO BE ACCOUNTED OF?” Isaiah 2.22.

“IT IS BETTER TO TRUST IN THE LORD, THAN TO PUT CONFI-

DENCE IN MAN. IT IS BETTER TO TRUST IN THE LORD, THAN TO PUT CONFIDENCE IN PRINCES." Psalm 118.8,9.

These shall be the way-marks of our present discourse.

Pride and impiety may pervert or deny the sentiments contained in these and similar declarations of God's word : still, they are both good and true. They do not prohibit a limited and qualified confidence in man ; they do not inculcate selfishness, distrust, and separation from our fellow creatures ; — a course which, to all society, would be ruinous and suicidal ; — but, admonishing us of the faithlessness of many, and the frailty of all mankind, they direct us to subordinate our confidence in them, to a superior trust in God. Society is God's ordinance, appointed in wisdom and beneficence. And, related to each other, as the individuals and classes of mankind are, they must be, in various ways and in different degrees, dependent on each other. Now, to suppose that the holy scriptures prohibit that mutual confidence which is so natural and so useful, as the ligament that binds society together, is to array the oracles of God against his institutions, and to impress them into the advocacy of a contracted selfishness, and a reckless anarchy, — which must inevitably lower all that is good and lovely in human relationships, down to a point inconsistent with their utility, nay, with their continuance.

The import of these and similar declarations of holy scripture, I take to be this ; — That we should recognize God's sceptre, as supreme, in the disposal of human affairs ; that we should modify our confidence in man, by the claims of a higher allegiance to *Him* ; and, that we should expect that alone of man, whether in public or private station

which comports with his dependence and fallibility, and justly belongs to the relations and enterprizes with which he stands responsibly connected. To look for more, ensures disappointment. To deify man, is to dishonor God and provoke his displeasure. That displeasure, for such an indignity, may fall upon us directly, overwhelming our hopes and our projects with confusion; or it may reach us indirectly, by striking down the objects of our excessive confidence — of our idolatrous veneration.

To the expansion and application of these thoughts, I devote the remainder of this discourse.

It is a fact, which I suppose will not be disputed, that men do often engage more of reverence, and more of confidence, than either propriety or prudence will justify. Great men, whether the materials of their greatness are intrinsic or accidental, are not always wise; are not always good. And, although they unite the good with the great, yet there are limits to the confidence which they may claim. In such case, the danger connected with excessive confidence may be less, but the moral impropriety of it is the same: the danger of their abusing confidence, and perverting power, may be abated; but the danger arising from the displeasure of God is not diminished. However excellent, in disposition, the human objects of our confidence may be; however eminent in capacity; however pure in patriotism; however modest in pretensions; however approved by trial; still they are men, and not God. They have animal infirmities, they are participants of human imperfection and depravity, they are subject to the general sentence of mortality.

These statements apply, with equal propriety, to civil

rulers. Exalted to stations of dignity and power, and devoting themselves to the discharge of their official functions, for promoting the interests of their constituents, they may, by the divine constitution of government, claim respect, esteem and confidence. And happy is it, when the claims of personal worth coalesce with those of official dignity. Still, there are restrictions and limitations which we may not, with impunity, transcend. Still, "it is better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in princes:" "their breath is in their nostrils:" being men, they must die; and their decease may disappoint our fondest hopes. Death makes no distinctions; he cherishes no favorites; he gives no dispensation from his power; he can be foiled by no efforts of skill; he can be dissuaded by no importunities of love.

Of this, my friends, we have mournful confirmation in the event that has just overwhelmed our nation with sorrow. God has seen fit to lay low, in the dust of death, the constitutional Head of our Republic, and a thrill of painful feeling vibrates through all its members. It is a sorrow that asks no pageantry for its display; it occupies its rightful seat — the retired and shaded sanctuary of a people's hearts. Surely we may mourn under such a stroke; but we may not repine: much less may we arraign the power that inflicted it. His judgments are a great deep, which we cannot fathom; but all their waters are held in the hollow of his hand: the blasts have swept over us; but they are his messengers, obedient to do his will: a heavy blow has fallen on us; but it was God's arm that guided its descent. And, to those who mingle piety with their patriotism, this thought is full of consolation; and it affords seasonable encouragement to

those who might, otherwise, be apprehensive for the consequences of this event upon the interests of the country. It, therefore, becomes the American people to say, with intelligent and christian submission, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth unto him good;" — "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

The attendant and incidental circumstances of this bereavement, both aggravate the severity of the trial, and demonstrate the sovereignty of its source: To some of these I request your attention.

It is the *first* bereavement of the kind, that the country has ever experienced. It comes upon us with the painful poignancy of a first affliction. It opens an unaccustomed fountain of national grief. Nine venerable and worthy men have occupied that presidential chair: the period of their administrations extended to more than half a century. Eight of these official dignitaries relinquished the post of high responsibility and honor, for the sweet retirement of a private home. Now, for the first time is it exchanged for a coffin and a grave.

It is a *sudden* bereavement. We had scarce a monitory warning of its approach. We had not even time to pray for his recovery. To thousands and thousands of the people, the same messengers bear the heavy tidings of his sickness and of his death. How sadly true of our President's life, is the Psalmist's graphic statement, — "the wind passeth over it, and it is gone, — and the place thereof shall know it no more."

It took him away *in the very outset of his administration*. Only the horizon dawnings of the expected day were greeted,

ere a cloud enwrapped his beams for ever. Like the Patriarch Moses, on Mount Nebo, he looked over the fair inheritance of a great people, and, while his patriotic bosom was glowing with generous anticipations of their good ; while "his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated," the vapors of Jordan's dark stream intervened and hid it for ever from his view.

It occurred at *a critical juncture*, when both the domestic condition of the country, and a delicate and difficult negotiation with a foreign power, require a strong and steady arm upon the helm of state.

It has deprived the public interests of one, *on whom fond hopes were fixed* ; and of whom, the popular voice had recently proclaimed, "*There is none like him.*" So soon after such a decision, his death could be regarded as no ordinary calamity. I do not propose to praise him : such an office would be but a superfluous echo of the general acclamation. *His history is his eulogy.* A long series of public services found him always competent ; a succession of public trusts proved him always faithful. No allegation has charged him with rapacity for gain, or with ambition for power. An honest friend of his country, his powers were promptly consecrated to her interests, whenever she signified her requisition. He was willing to serve her in the field or in the Senate ; in public or in private life ; at the arduous and perplexing post of territorial government, or in the executive office of the nation. Nor do I deem it in a small measure creditable to his character, as a conscientious and independent man, that, amid the imposing solemnities of his inauguration ; at the moment of taking his conspicuous position as the

President of the United States ; with thousands of his constituents around him ; and in the august presence of the Representatives of the American people and of foreign potentates, he deviated so far from the frigid and merely theistical recognitions of his predecessors, as to profess his firm belief in our *christian religion*, as the basis and bulwark of national prosperity.

But I did not design to eulogise him — the public man, in these times, needs no eulogist, who never had or needed an apologist.

Consolatory and encouraging is the reflection, I repeat it, that a bereavement, attended by so many trying and mysterious circumstances, is, nevertheless, within the providential jurisdiction of God. Happy are we, to know that, with Him, there is nothing contingent, nothing uncontrollable ; that no event, however inauspicious in appearance, can embarrass his plans, or frustrate the purposes of his independent government. His thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are his ways like ours. It is his prerogative to raise up one and to put down another. The Powers that be are ordained of God. He is the Lord of lords. By Him kings reign, and princes decree justice. And his controlling and resistless sovereignty often appears, both in public and private affairs, in dispensing with instrumentalities that were apparently indispensable, and in frustrating plans that were apparently most feasible ; and, also, in crowning with success, measures and men that were apparently the most unpromising. Therefore, while we tremble and weep, at the affliction which he hath sent upon us, we may repose the most implicit and unfaltering confidence in his wisdom, power and compassion. Although, as

the prophet says, "The Lord, the Lord of hosts taketh away the mighty man, and the man of war, the judge, and the prophet, and the prudent, and the ancient, the captain of fifty, and the counsellor, and the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator," (Isaiah 3.2,3,) yet he doth not exclude the interests of mankind from his regard, or embarrass his own plans for their advancement. And while this afflictive dispensation, with a mournful emphasis, admonishes us to "cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils;" it enjoins us, as a nation, to trust in the sovereign and mighty God, "by whom kings reign and princes decree justice."

This event, in itself, demonstrates the uncertainty of hopes that rest on human capacity and achievement, and the vanity of earthly greatness, even in its best estate. And, in its remote results, I doubt not, it will confirm, by a new trial, the correctness of the theory of our unparalleled civil constitution, and admirably illustrate the right-heartedness of the American people.

Look at those hopes, — hopes so lately fresh and blooming, now withered and strawn. It is an indisputable fact, that the great body of the American people did fix their hopes on Gen. Harrison, as the individual under whose auspices, in the presidential office, the country might regain its prosperity, and be reinstated in the honest and honorable Republicanism of its earlier days. I express no opinion of the causes of depression and degeneracy, or of the demand for a change of measures and of men. I am not forgetful of the supposed impertinence and imprudence of uttering maxims and opinions of civil policy from the pulpit; and I am going to do no such thing; I have no disposition to startle prejudice, or even

to shock stupidity, upon that point. Nevertheless, the hopes, which I allude to, did exist, whatever I or others may think of them. They fired the bosoms of the people ; they cheered, invigorated and united them, in the late political contest. Those hopes seemed to be realized, or, at least, doubly assured by his elevation. Where are they now ? So far as he was personally concerned, they are entombed with him ; and and bereaved America, tearful and trembling, casts a pensive and timorous eye over the period which she deemed him destined to brighten and bless.

Behold, too, the melting away of earthly greatness ! When I sit down and reflect on the events of the last six months, I am confounded with the various, mighty and rapid vicissitudes in human affairs. We seem to have passed through excitement and incident enough to fill up the history of an age. A private citizen becomes the rallying point of party arrangements, that reach to the remotest corners of our extensive empire, and that animate every man with a zeal which seems to identify the destiny of the nation with his individual action. In ten thousand neighborhoods, they meet to decide the civil strife : a thrilling suspense, of universal uncertainty, is terminated by the irreversible announcement ; —and upon that private citizen devolves the distinguished glory of presiding over the civil affairs of seventeen millions of people ! We looked upon him in amazement, —but while we looked, we saw him grow pale, and sink, —and gasp, —and die : —“and wherein is he any more to be accounted of !”

Do crowned heads rank high in the circles of human greatness ? Much more did he : for it was not the accident of

royal birth ; it was not the issue of ambition that exalted him. No, it was a nobler cause ! High, by undisputed merit, in the hearts of the people ; their suffrage raised him high, in official station. Their spontaneous call drew him from the retirement and repose of private life, “ which he had hoped would be perpetual ;” and the enthusiasm of their patriotism, placed him at the post of high responsibility, occupied only by those whom the people delight to trust and honor. They saw him constitutionally invested with the honors and authority of the lofty station ; they mingled their gratulations together ; and the voice of rejoicing was heard through the land. But, scarcely had the pleasant gales wafted the plaudits of a delighted people to the borders of the empire, ere they are commissioned to bear the heavy tidings, thrilling to every heart, that *the President of the Union is dead !* So transitory is earthly greatness ! “ Man, being in honor, abideth not !” “ He dieth ; yea, he giveth up the ghost ; and where is he !”

The entire body of the American people have united, in paying the tribute of their grief to the memory of their departed Chief. And I cannot refrain from expressing the satisfaction I felt in witnessing the perfect unanimity of our citizens on the sorrowful occasion. The suppression of party feeling, and the cordial commingling of sorrows and sympathies, were too obvious, not to be noticed ; too gratifying, not to be spoken of. Thus it was, not only in our own village and vicinity, where, perhaps more than in many other places, the proprieties of social life regulate the habits of the community ; but, throughout the whole Republic ; in town and

country, among the rustic and the gay, and amid all classes and denominations of people ; the death of the President, while it diffused a general gloom and sorrow, seemed to soften, and subdue, and blend, to one sympathetic shade, the popular feeling, that was recently so agitated by important interests and conflicting views. The visible solemnity that distinguished the entire community, and the absence of all hardness and levity, struck me as peculiarly honorable to my fellow citizens, and doubly assured me of the safety of our civil institutions, in the keeping of such a people, — a people who can differ in opinion, without hating each other ; who can strive as partizans, and yet coalesce as one family ; who can cast their suffrages for one individual, and yet, in default of his election, give allegiance and honor to another. While intelligence and probity prevail among our American people, the interests of the country, and the claims of the constitution will be paramount to those of any party, and the support and submission, due to constituted authorities, will be rendered by the citizens. Reason and revelation sustain the claims of equitable government, against insubordination and anarchy ; and men will, “for conscience’ sake,” be subject to the powers that be. So it was in the present case. The power and prevalence of these sentiments were demonstrated by the general honor which the President received while living, and the general lamentation when he died. William Henry Harrison was, indeed, the candidate of a party ; but he became the acknowledged and honored President of the whole people. They were many, who rejoiced in his official advent, but they are more who mourn his early departure ; and the badges that recently distinguished the pref-

erences of a party, were far less numerous than those which now symbolize our universal sorrow.

Trust not in princes, nor man's son,
 In whom there is no stay :
 His breath departs, to earth he turns ;
 That day his thoughts decay.
 Oh happy is that man, and blessed,
 Whom Jacob's God doth aid ;
 Whose hope upon the Lord doth rest,
 And on his God is stayed.

Psalm 146.3,4,5.

In God my glory placed is,
 And my salvation sure ;
 In God the rock is of my strength,
 My refuge most secure.
 Ye people, place your confidence
 In him continually ;
 Before him pour ye out your heart :
 God is our refuge high.

Psalm 62.7,8.

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